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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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6 June 1962

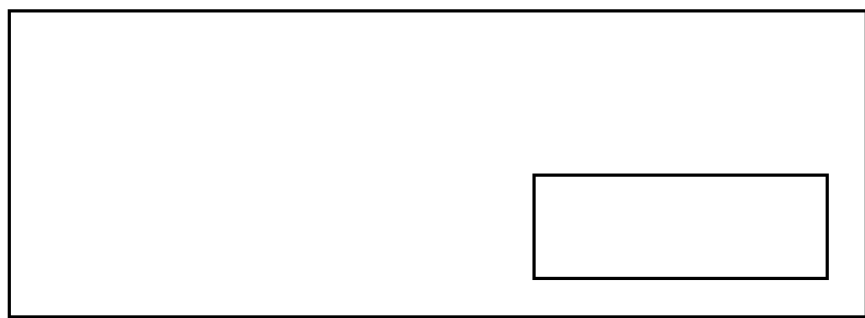
MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Communist Reactions to Additional US Courses of
Action in Laos and North Vietnam

1. The Laos Task Force has prepared a memorandum for the President dated 4 June 1962 concerning possible US courses of action with respect to Laos. Certain courses considered therein were developed subsequent to publication of SNIE 58-5-62, "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible US Actions with Respect to Laos," dated 31 May 1962. The following is our estimate of the likely Communist response to the three additional courses of action.

A. US air attacks against Communist supply bases in Laos and against the Laotian parts of the main supply routes from North Vietnam. This course of action may be taken in connection with or subsequent to occupation of the major Mekong River areas of Laos by 8,000-10,000 US troops supported by Thai forces.

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2. The Communists would almost certainly conclude that the US was preparing for extensive military operations in Laos, particularly if reinforcements and supplies were being built up in Thailand. They would be concerned to prevent the US air attacks from reducing their capabilities ~~and~~ to maintain their forces in the areas of Laos they now control. Therefore, it seems likely that North Vietnamese antiaircraft units in Laos would be reinforced and that fighter aircraft, probably flown by Communist Chinese and Soviet pilots, would be introduced. The Soviet airlift would almost certainly continue as feasible.

3. On the ground, the Communist forces in Laos would probably deploy to confine the areas under US control, and they would harass US outposts, patrols, and lines of communications. North Vietnamese reinforcements would almost certainly be introduced. The Chinese Communists would reinforce their border garrisons and some forces might enter northern Laos. Moscow and Peiping would almost certainly increase their logistics support to North Vietnam.

4. At the same time the Communists would be concerned to keep the conflict from spreading beyond Laos, and would take vigorous political action to obtain a cessation of hostilities

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and the resumption of negotiations. So long as the US air attacks were confined to Laos, the Communists would probably not extend their own air operations beyond Laos, though they would attack allied forces and installations in Laotian territory.

B. US air attacks against North Vietnam. The US air attacks would be extended to include the North Vietnamese parts of the main supply routes into Laos, but not the principal population centers such as Hanoi.

5. Attacks on North Vietnam territory would, in the Communist view, mark a major turning point in the situation. The Soviets and Chinese would declare their full support for Hanoi. They would almost certainly seek condemnation of the US in the UN for what would be called an act of outright aggression.

6. Such US attacks would almost certainly be regarded by Peiping and Moscow as the forerunner of a general military offensive against North Vietnam. They would almost certainly provide the air support necessary to protect North Vietnamese territory. The chances of the introduction of Chinese Communist troops into Laos would increase significantly. However, we do not believe that they would be introduced into

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North Vietnam at this stage. Although the Communists would still be concerned to keep the hostilities from spreading further, we believe that the chances are at least even that they would extend their attacks to include bases in Thailand and South Vietnam, and, possibly, US carriers. We do not believe that there would be significant differences between Moscow and Peiping, insofar as the question of coming to the aid of Hanoi is concerned.

C. Amphibious Operations Against North Vietnam.

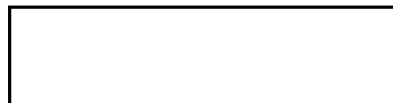
This situation assumes a division-strength landing in the Vinh area followed by a drive west to the Laos border to link up with US forces in Laos.

7. Open invasion of North Vietnam would be considered by the Communist Bloc as a direct challenge and they would not hesitate to respond to it. Hanoi would take immediate steps to repel the invasion, using its 300,000-man army. Communist China would almost certainly provide additional ground forces if they were needed. US naval units in the area would almost certainly be engaged by Soviet and Chinese Communist air and naval forces; supply and operational bases in Laos, South Vietnam, and Thailand would probably be attacked by Communist air forces. However, we do not believe that the Communists would take the initiative to spread the war beyond

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southeast Asia or resort to the use of nuclear weapons
at this level of US action.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES



SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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